(b) whether Government would suspend recovery of loans from farmers in view thereof and instruct the bank authorities and financial institutions to provide interest free loans to farmers, to face the drought situation; and

(c) if so. by when these instructions in this regard would be issued by Government?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK): (a) Occurrences of drought do affect crops and the economic condition of the farmers.

(b) and (c) In the case of crop failure due to natural calamities like drought, there are in-built provisions in the credit system to reschedule the loans so as to make the farmers eligible for fresh loans for the next crop season. The Government of India has also introduced the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme to compensate the farmers in case of damage to crops on account of natural calamities. There is, however, no scheme under operation which provides for interest free loans to the farmers due to occurrence of natural calamities.

Decline in the cultivated area

4295. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA : Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that all India production of foodgrains was lower by 12.8 million MT during the last financial year;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the fresh steps taken/proposed to be taken by Government to check the trend of sharp decline in the cultivated area all over the country, especially in Orissa?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK): (a) The All-India production of foodgrains during agriculture year 2000-2001 is expected to be lower by 12.8 million tonnes compared to that of the preceding year.

(b) The performance of agriculture sector is highly correlated with performance of monsoon as about 38 per cent of net area sown is irrigated and the remaining 62 per cent depends on rainfall. The overall rainfall during monsoon 2000 was deficient by 8 per cent which was accentuated during the subsequent seasons. The western parts of India especially Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya

Pradesh faced acute rainfall deficiency as a result of which large areas faced moisture stress. Deficient rains adversely affected the irrigation potential also.

(c) The Government has been taking, overtime, several measures to increase production and productivity of agricultural crops in various parts of the country including Orissa and consequently there is generally a long term upward trend in production of foodgrain crops such as rice, wheat and oilseeds etc. However, the production of agricultural crops tend to fluctuate sometimes, from year to year, due to agro-climatic conditions and to meet such a situation contingency plans are drawn, which are location and condition specific.

Middlemen/Commission Agents between Fruit/Vegetable Growers and Consumers

4296. SHRI K.M KHAN: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have made a study of the system of middlemen or commission agents, operating between the growers and the actual consumers of common fruits and vegetables like mango, cabbage, potato, onion, etc.;

(b) if so, the difference between the prices paid to growers and by the consumers, commodity-wise, during the last three months;

(c) the steps taken by Government to facilitate the producers/growers to reach the retail market outlets easily;

(d) whether Government would augment the Infrastructure and also take necessary steps to cut down the system of middlemen; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK): (a) and (b) The Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI), an attached office of Ministry of Agriculture has conducted the following studies on marketing of horticultural produce covering price spread:—

(i) Marketing Costs and Margins of Major Agricultural Commodities in India (1985)

(ii) Marketing of Potato in India (1984)

(iii) Marketing of Onion in India (1992)